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**CHOOSING AND
PRODUCING A PLAY**

CHOOSING AND PRODUCING A PLAY

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR
CLUBS AND SCHOOLS

BY

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LONDON
SIR ISAAC PITMAN & SONS, LTD.

1947

SIR ISAAC PITMAN & SONS, Ltd
PITMAN HOUSE, PARKER STREET, KINGSWAY, LONDON, W C.2
THE PITMAN PRESS, BATH
PITMAN HOUSE, LITTLE COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE
UNITED STATES BUILDING, RIVER VALLEY ROAD, SINGAPORE
27 BECKETTS BUILDINGS, PRESIDENT STREET, JOHANNESBURG

ASSOCIATED COMPANIES
PITMAN PUBLISHING CORPORATION
2 WEST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK
205 WEST MONROE STREET, CHICAGO

SIR ISAAC PITMAN & SONS (CANADA), Ltd.
(INCORPORATING THE COMMERCIAL TEXT BOOK COMPANY)
PITMAN HOUSE, 381-383 CHURCH STREET, TORONTO



THE PAPER AND BINDING OF
THIS BOOK CONFORM TO THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE PITMAN PRESS, BATH
D7—(G 266)

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Extract from a letter written by Bernard Shaw to Sir John Forbes-Robertson after the publication (in 1925) of the latter's memoirs, "The Stage in My Time."

"I HOPE you have given a copy of the book to the library of the R.A.D.A. (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art); for now that you have left the stage there is only the printed word to show the students that to reach the highest rank it is not necessary to be an egotist or a monster, and that though good-looking spooks can do very well on the stage as long as there are authors and producers to fit their poor hollow bodies with souls, still, the man with positive character and artistic culture, difficult as it is at first for him to surrender himself to a fictitious personality, is the only man who can become finally a classic actor."

Taken from—

BERNARD SHAW, *His Life and Personality*, by HESKETH PEARSON (Collins).

By courtesy of Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. Hesketh Pearson, and Messrs. W. Collins, Sons & Co., Ltd.

THE PRODUCER'S JOB

THE following practical suggestions are directed to all those amateur Drama enthusiasts who are anxious to produce plays, but find themselves lost for want of a *method* when they come to grips with a play. They are based on questions that have been asked again and again by members of Youth Clubs, either in their own small circles or at Drama Courses.

You, the Producer, are responsible for the actors, their movements, the variation in tempo and in the pace and tone of the words, the costumes, the settings, the lighting, the make-up, and the music. It is you who will knit together these various elements to make a balanced whole—to give shape and unity to the play. Without you, a production would be mere rags and tatters, just as an orchestra would go to pieces without its conductor.

CHOICE OF PLAY

WHEN choosing your play make sure of *two* things:—

1. That it will suit the type of people in your Society.
2. That it is a play that you, the producer, *want* to produce.

You must, of course, *read* as many plays as possible; it is useless to choose a play at random from a catalogue merely because the title looks suitable.

TYPES OF PLAY

Farce

These plays should be avoided by the average Dramatic Society, yet owing to their popularity in the West End of

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London a play of this type is often chosen, with unfortunate results.

Many of these plays have been written for specific actors (e.g., the Aldwych farces, by Ben Travers, such as *Tons of Money*) and they require exceptional acting ability: a lightness of touch and a gift for comedy that few people possess and a *pace* that amateurs can rarely achieve, and it is lack of pace that kills a play. This point cannot be over-emphasized, for it is the chief weakness of many amateur productions.

To attempt to produce a farce (unless you have a very accomplished cast) is like struggling to play a very quick and intricate passage on the piano before mastering the scales and arpeggios.

These remarks apply, in a somewhat lesser degree, to *light comedy*—plays like *Call it a Day* (Dodie Smith) and *George and Margaret* (Gerald Savory), where the situations are not quite so exaggerated as in farce; and to satirical comedy, as in *Scenario*, by Du Garde Peach.

"Kitchen" Comedy

Many producers, especially beginners, concentrate on this type of play, believing it to be the "easiest" type for acting; and thinking, too, that it is necessary to start in the basement and work up through the house to the lounge, where the supposedly more difficult sophisticated play is performed.

It does not follow that a person can play a cook's part because she is a cook in real life. You want a person who can *act* a cook's part.

The danger in this type of play is *over-acting*: the characters, being regarded as "easy" to act, are played as caricatures. The "kitchen" comedy, while very suitable, requires great *restraint*. Avoid the conventional and hackneyed "business," e.g., running the forefinger

to and fro under the nose, in the case of a maid, or pretending to have adenoids. These may have been funny once. And they are not characteristic of maids.

The "Straight" Play

For beginners, it is wise to choose a play with a serious theme, as there is far less chance of over-acting; the pace is less exacting and the range more limited than in farce, light comedy, or tragedy.

There will, of course, be humour and pathos of the kind we meet with in everyday life, which can be grasped and interpreted by the average person.

Under this heading will come fantasy (e.g., *Columbine*, by Reginald Arkell) and historical plays where costume is an added attraction and advantage, and also gives confidence to your players.

Impressionistic Plays

Such plays, usually in one act, are very suitable for a progressive amateur society, as they give plenty of scope for experimenting with scenery, lighting, and costumes, and are therefore essentially producers' plays.

The acting calls only for "impressions" of characters, so that only the broad and more obvious traits are emphasized, no subtle characterizations being needed.

Examples of these plays are: *The Last War*, *The Age of Leisure*, both by Neil Grant, and *Cupid Rampant*, by Percy Corry.

Tragedy

After you have had some experience, plays with a tragic theme are very suitable.

Remember, tragedy plays on the whole scale of the emotions, and great care is needed not to make the bottom notes too loud, or the top notes too shrill. In

other words, tragedy lends itself to over-acting, not in the superficial manner of "Kitchen" comedy with its hackneyed business, but in allowing the emotions too great a rein.

Dispel the idea that Shakespeare requires a special style of acting. What is required is development of character combined with an instinct for those moments when the acting should give way, unobtrusively, to poetic interpretation, so that the voice can concentrate on the beauty of the poetry and bring out to the full its music.

Shakespeare had a profound understanding of human nature, and his characters are the characters of all time—the stuff we ourselves are made of. We can look round us to-day and still see the Romeos and Juliets, the Orlandos and Rosalinds, the Lorenzos and Jessicas, and the whole gallery of his characters, whether they be lovers, villains, dictators, or petty rogues. Human feelings do not alter with the years: we love and hate now in much the same way as our ancestors did; only the superficial things show marked change, such as fashions in clothes or hairdressing.

So if you have any members in your society who can speak poetry with feeling—and the most unpromising material often responds to sympathetic coaching—producing Shakespeare is a most stimulating experience: the characters have reality and the beauty of the words never palls. Shakespeare's plays have the added advantages of costume and of being free of royalties; and they can be produced on the barest of stages.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

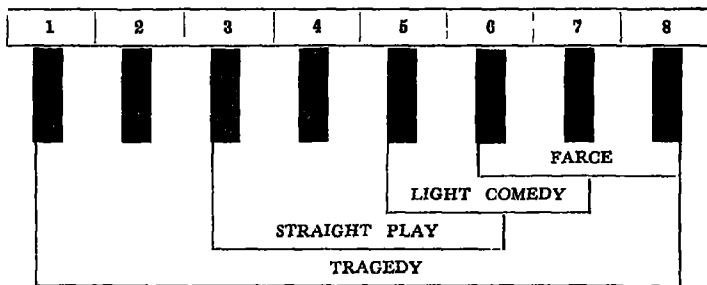
In choosing a play, then, *the first consideration must be the characters*. It is for you to make the best of your existing stage to meet the requirements of the settings,

etc.; but no matter how good your stage or lighting, these things are only subsidiary: it is the *acting* that counts.

Lastly, bear in mind that an author does not write his plays for good stages or bad stages; he assumes that conditions are adequate. Half the pleasure of amateur production comes from battling with the hundred and one difficulties that crop up on all home-made stages. Yours is unlikely to be the worst stage in the country—though each one seems to be “the worst.” If you are an enthusiastic producer you will see that something is done to improve it at each production, especially if the stage is permanent.

Perhaps the following illustration might help in choosing a play.

Imagine the *emotional range* of each human being to consist of a scale of eight notes—



Number 1 is the lowest note—number 8 the highest. The bottom notes represent the tragic mood; the top ones the happy, humorous, or farcical moods.

If you choose Tragedy the *whole* scale of the emotions will be brought into play (because there are lighter moments in tragedy), but more especially Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Thus the acting range is very great, but the *pace* on the low notes is far slower than that required

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on the high notes; because when tragedy overtakes us, however small the incident may be, its effect seems slow and relentless. No doubt you can remember some of your childhood "tragedies" and recall those long periods of utter darkness.

If, on the other hand, you choose Farce or Light Comedy, only the top part of the scale will be used—Numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8; but they will have to be played very quickly and with intricate variations requiring great skill and precision, because one becomes more animated and excited under such conditions. Thus, though the range is very much less than in Tragedy, this particular type of play is difficult. There are no slow, resounding bass notes to smother the mistakes. The fingering, indeed, is intricate, and calls for exceptional pace, which is far more difficult to vary when you have so few notes.

If, however, you choose the "straight" play, the emphasis will be on Numbers 3, 4, 5, and sometimes 6 of the emotional scale, which is much more normal and easier for the average person to grasp or feel and interpret. There will, for instance, be no chance for "banging" on the bottom notes—that is to say, the player will have little opportunity of getting out of his emotional depth; nor will he be asked to perform highly involved and often artificial emotional feats on the top notes, which call for exceptional dramatic talent.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME FOR BEGINNERS

If your Society is newly formed it would be advisable not to choose a three-act play at first. On the other hand it is often difficult to find three one-act plays suitable for your members to make up an evening's programme.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME FOR BEGINNERS 7

This difficulty can be overcome by a programme, to be given as one performance, on the following lines—

1. A Ballad.
2. A Literature Recital, with musical accompaniment if necessary.
3. A Mime.
4. A One-act Play.

This lends variety and would give every member of your group a part or parts.

The Literature Recital would lay stress on speech and breathing, and members could be encouraged to make their own selections. An excellent book for the purpose is *Literature Recitals*, by Alys Mamour (Macmillan).

The Ballad and Mime would give emphasis to movement, gesture, and grouping.

In the case of the Mime the story is either spoken or sung by a narrator or chorus, while the pictures are supplied in dumb show; the same may apply to the Ballad, but here, apart from the narrator or chorus, the characters usually speak their respective parts while a suitable air is played softly as a background.

Such practice in the more elementary techniques of acting will give your players confidence and instil enthusiasm into them.

Great care, however, must be taken not to exaggerate the movement too much, as this would tend to make your players over-act in the straight plays.

Two excellent books to meet these requirements are *Ballads and Ballad Plays*, edited by John Hampden, and *Mimes and Miming*, by Isabel Chisman and Gladys Wiles (Nelson).

If you are unable to find a speaking or even a walking-on part for every member of your group, choose one to be Stage Manager and another the Prompter, and make these two people feel that they are playing important parts and

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that their co-operation is essential to the success of your production.

A Prompter who "drifts in" at the Dress Rehearsal or who is dragged in at the last moment before the curtain goes up on "the night" is a positive menace.

Your Prompter must *know* the play—as you know it, with all the movements and pauses, so that the prompting is only necessary if there is a genuine breakdown. Nothing is worse, for either the player or the audience, than to hear the prompter's voice in the middle of a "dramatic pause."

Therefore your Prompter must attend all your rehearsals—and from this little corner of the stage a great deal can be learnt; so your Prompter of to-day may be your star of to-morrow.

Similarly, a Stage Manager is a vitally important person and must have an intimate knowledge of the play so that all the "props" are assembled in the right places at the right times; and this requires attendance at rehearsals.

It might be found helpful if the Stage Manager pasted up a clean sheet of paper at the beginning of each act or scene, so that a rough plan of each setting can be drawn, together with a careful list of the "props."

Further, the Stage Manager should be encouraged to suggest settings and methods for rapid changes if there is more than one scene. A production might easily be spoilt by long waits between scenes.

You must also encourage your members who are in charge of the Lighting, the Music, and the construction of sets—if any. It is all-round co-operation that counts, and this co-operation will depend upon you.

It cannot be over-emphasized that all these jobs must be carried out efficiently and are vital to the success of a production.

PLAYS TO READ

THE following is a list of volumes of one-act plays you should read, and encourage your group to read, either individually or at specified times given over to play-reading. It is only by this method that a satisfactory choice of play can be made; never rely on recommendation, for tastes differ and groups vary widely in technical ability.

SHORT PLAYS

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Three Modern Plays and a Mime</i> | } | Edited by
John Hampden
(Nelson) |
| <i>Four Modern Plays</i> | | |
| <i>Eight Modern Plays</i> | | |
| <i>Nine Modern Plays</i> | | |
| <i>Ten Modern Plays</i> | | |
| <i>Fifteen Modern Plays</i> | | |
| <i>The Drama Highway</i> , in 6 volumes | } | All by
L. Du Garde Peach
(Pitman) |
| <i>Famous Men of Britain</i> | | |
| <i>Famous Women of Britain</i> | | |
| <i>Knights of the Round Table</i> | | |
| <i>Plays of the Family Goodman</i> | | |
| <i>Three Costume Plays</i> (mainly for schools),
by Vincent White | } | (Harrap) |
| <i>Ten One-act Plays for Women</i> , selected by
Elizabeth Everard | | |
| <i>At Rise of Curtain</i> , by Ella Atkins, 1946 | | |
| <i>One Night in Bethlehem</i> (four nativity plays
for children), by Kathleen Nesbit | | |
| <i>One-act Plays of To-day</i> (six volumes), and
the <i>Best One-act Plays</i> series, both edited
by J. W. Marriot | | |
| <i>Junior One-act Plays</i> , editor A. E. M. Bayliss | | |
| <i>One-act Plays for Players</i> , editor Sydney Box | | |
| <i>Soviet One-act Plays</i> , selected by Herbert Marshall.
(Pilot Press) | | |

- Eight Prize-winning Plays*, editor H. Quekett
Ladies Only, by Muriel and Sydney Box
Let's Mime, by Lilian Sayce
Ten Selected One-act Plays (all new plays),
 edited by Max H. Fuller, 1943
Old England at Play (old plays adapted for
 young players), by Lynette Feasey, 1943
Recent One-act Plays, selected by A. E. M.
 Bayliss, 1943
More Selected One-Act Plays, edited by
 Max H. Fuller, 1946
The Castles of England, and Practical
Plays for Stage and Classroom in
 two series, by L. du Garde Peach
The London Dramatic Books (for ages
 11-14), by Rodney Bennett
Twelve Modern Plays, edited by John Hampden.
 (Duckworth)
Collections of Eight One-act Plays, by various editors.
 (Lovat Dickson)
- (Harrap)
- (University of
London Press)

COLLECTIONS OF THREE-ACT PLAYS

(For your own first reading you can often borrow these volumes from your local library.)

- English Miracle Plays*, by Pollard. (O.U.P.)
Earlier English Drama (from Robin Hood to Everyman),
 edited and arranged by F. T. Tickner. (Nelson)
Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, edited by J. Q. Adams.
 (Harrap)
The Chief Elizabethan Dramatists, edited by W. A.
 Neilson. (Harrap)
Great Modern British Plays, edited by J. W. Marriot.
 (Harrap)
The Chief British Dramatists, edited by Matthews and
 Lieder. (Harrap)

British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, edited by G. H. Nettleton and A. C. Case. (Harrap)

Collections of Modern "Famous Plays" and Six Soviet Plays. (Editor and Publisher, Victor Gollancz)

Collections of Modern Plays. (Hamish Hamilton)

Collections of Plays of To-day. (Sidgwick & Jackson)

Devonshire Plays, by Eden Phillpotts. (Duckworth)

The Plays of Bernard Shaw (separate volumes). (Constable)

Plays by J. B. Priestley (separate volumes). (Heinemann)

Three Plays, by J. B. Priestley, 1943. (Heinemann)

Four Plays, by J. B. Priestley, 1945. (Heinemann)

Galsworthy's Plays (separate volumes). (Duckworth)

Plays by A. A. Milne (separate volumes). (Chatto & Windus)

Plays in Prose and Verse, by W. B. Yeats. (Macmillan)

Three Comedies—

1. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, by Beaumont and Fletcher.

2. *The Critic*, by Sheridan.

3. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by Wilde (edited by G. P. Earle). (Ginn & Co.)

Shakespeare's Plays—suitable editions for the amateur actor. (Nelson)

A Macbeth Production, by John Masefield. (Heinemann)

Shaw's Plays (Penguin Series).

Never write to an author or agent for permission to perform a play *free of Royalty* on the plea that your production is in aid of a charity. Most amateur dramatic societies give some of their profits to charity—and authors must live.

The agent's name and address is usually given at the foot of each play and permission must be obtained from the agent *before* you give a public performance. Be very careful about this point.

THE PRODUCER'S FIRST APPROACH TO A PLAY

You, as Producer, must have a clear conception of the play *as a whole* before rehearsals start; therefore read the play over carefully several times and in so doing—

1. Make a list of the *qualities of character* of each part: e.g., tolerant, patient, aggressive, brave, insolent, diffident, and so on.

You will arrive at these qualities by studying carefully what each character says and does, and what other characters say about him (or her).

For example: Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* proves by his words and actions that he is conceited, austere, and devoid of humour; yet he is obviously a very efficient Steward to Olivia, because the latter says of him, "I would not have him miscarry for half of my dowry." This point would obviously have to be taken into account when acting the part as it is a "good quality" and would compel the player to restrain his performance lest he made a mere buffoon of him.

The more complex the part, the more sides or qualities of character there will be; sometimes, however, one or two will suffice, but it is impossible to act a part correctly unless such points are absolutely clear, and you cannot begin to direct the acting until you are on intimate terms with every character as portrayed by the author and feel you know them all. Only so can you hope to get clear-cut characterization—and *real, living people will move before your mind's eye.*

2. Try, also, to get a clear picture of these characters in their proper settings.

Some people can do this better by reading a scene and then relaxing and closing the eyes. Others are

aided by a quiet musical background (wireless or gramophone), which stirs the emotions and so stimulates the imagination. Experiment for yourself to find what suits you best.

3. Jot down (in pencil), in the text, any *movement* that comes to your mind that you think would be effective.

Most playwrights include some directions for movement, but it is what is *built in* by the producer that brings the play to life, and the value of this preliminary pondering cannot be over-emphasized. Further, when you start rehearsals, these movements can be tried out and this kind of thing creates confidence in you, the producer.

THE FIRST REHEARSAL

THIS should be given over to *reading* the play.

1. Make it clear that this reading is to find the most suitable people for the parts (you will have some idea, perhaps, beforehand), and that your casting will be *provisional* for the first two or three rehearsals. This will not tie your hands and will avoid friction should any changes be necessary.

2. Then seat the group, preferably round a table, listen carefully to each person reading, and make up your mind if the *voice* suits the character—as you have conceived it. Give each one a chance to read small sections of the main part; sometimes quite unexpected talent is revealed. Suitability of voice cannot be over-emphasized; it is more than half the battle in choosing your cast.

At the end of the rehearsal you might pick out the climax of the play (only about a page of dialogue) and

let the players act it on their own for a few minutes. This is a stimulating end to what must of necessity be a quiet session from the acting point of view.

This reading must be treated seriously, and will, together with your suggestions and those of the cast, take up the whole time allotted for the first rehearsal. Do not attempt any more. It will give everyone a time to think things over before the next rehearsal. Never rush into production: a careful foundation is half the battle.

THE SECOND REHEARSAL

CONCENTRATE entirely on *movement* at this rehearsal. Whether you have a permanent stage or not, you must set the scene as it will be during the actual presentation.

1. Go to the rehearsal armed with a rough sketch of the *exits* and *entrances* and the *position of the furniture*. Quite often the author has drawn one for you, but you need not keep rigidly to it; you may have to modify or alter it to suit your stage.

2. It doesn't matter how crude the "settee" or "throne" is at rehearsals—chairs will suffice: three for the settee, one for the throne. The point that matters is that it is possible to sit down at the correct time, in the correct manner, and in the correct position, and such arrangements as these can be made as well on any adequate floor space as on a stage.

Don't allow yourself to be side-tracked into other technicalities at this second rehearsal. The players, of course, will read their respective parts, but ignore any shortcomings in that direction; just try out the broad movements suggested by the author together with those you have visualized in your preliminary study of the

play, and those which suggest themselves during the rehearsal.

Do not muddle this with *gesture*—those smaller movements of the hands or head: these more subtle and significant points must be left until the words are learnt, so that your players are not hampered by books—hence the importance of the words being learnt as soon as possible.

This fixing of movement will, of necessity, be a slow process, and will take more than one rehearsal with a one-act play, while with one of three acts a number of rehearsals must be given up to this one point because these first movements are necessary to give life to the play. Of course, other significant movements will be added as the production takes shape, but it is useless rehearsing and hoping that “movement” will somehow find its way in as the players learn their parts.

Every movement must be learnt as rigidly as the words and should be rehearsed *at home* when the lines are being learnt. Thus, once you have fixed on a particular movement make sure of two things—

1. That you *write* it down in your copy of the play adjoining the appropriate words.
2. That each member of the cast concerned *writes* it down, too.

Unless this is done there will be constant argument the next time you meet.

INDIVIDUAL REHEARSALS

WHILE you are working out the movements of the play, arrangements should be made for private rehearsals with individual members of your cast, in order to discuss

each part in detail, and to pass on your list of the various qualities of character you made in your preliminary study; and also to point and vary the pace and tone of the words.

It is far better to do this individually than to attempt such details at a full rehearsal; it avoids wasting the time of the whole cast whilst one character is being discussed and thus prevents the others from becoming bored by hanging about.

It is vital to maintain the interest of your cast as a whole, and the above method will go far to achieve this end.

At these rehearsals—

1. Listen to the particular person reading the lines; try them over yourself, and, between you, decide on the variation of pace, the tone of the voice, and the places where slight pauses will add dramatic intensity to a speech and so make it more pointed. It is a great advantage if you are a good reader and can alter your voice to suit the various characters, as many of your players will need help in this way.

2. Then *mark* your copies clearly with appropriate words: e.g., slow, quicker, louder, etc., over the portion of the text concerned; next, *underline* words you think should be specially emphasized; and put a *vertical line* in front of each word where you have decided a pause is necessary.

For example—

Viola (in *Twelfth Night*), disguised as the page-boy Cesario, is telling her master, the Count Orsino, her family history, and explains how a sister of hers had fallen in love but had never revealed it to her lover.

Actually she is in love with the Count Orsino herself, and is confessing her love for him in this indirect way,

so she is making up this little story about her sister; she is the sister.

Suddenly the Count, who, of course, thinks she is a boy, asks her:

"But died thy sister of her love, my boy?"

to which Viola answers:

"I am all the daughters of my father's house
And all the brothers too: and yet I know not.
Sir, shall I to this lady?"

Obviously, Viola has overstepped the mark and has revealed her identity. (That the Count doesn't notice it is another matter.)

Read Viola's lines through at *one* speed. They sound dull and unattractive.

Now go over the speech in the way suggested.

Emphasize "I" in the first line, which should be said at normal speed. Therefore, underline "I."

In the second line she almost reveals her identity to Orsino because the words "all the brothers too" imply that she is the person she has been talking about—and they were probably said on the spur of the moment, so make a slight pause before "all"—and then say "all the brothers too" more quickly. Therefore put a vertical line after "And" and after "too" and write "quicker" over the phrase.

The rest of the line "and yet I know not" is an "aside," thus the voice would be dropped. She means that she still has hopes that her brother Sebastian is alive. (She thinks he has been drowned in the shipwreck from which she was saved.)

Suddenly the full realization of what she has said dawns on her, and in order to try and cover up her confusion she says very quickly and with emphasis: "Sir, shall I to this lady?" (The lady is Olivia, with whom Orsino is in love, and Viola—as Cesario—is taking his love messages to her.)

So your copy might look like this—

“I am all the daughters of my father’s house,
quicker
 And I all the brothers too; I and yet I know not.
very quickly and louder
 Sir, shall I to this lady?”

Now try reading it through.

Thus, when you have finished, your copy of the play will be covered with notes on every aspect of production, and unless you go over each speech in this manner the production will become monotonous.

When all these points have been decided, the players should begin to learn their parts, *but not before*; it is much easier to learn a part when it has been carefully analysed in the manner suggested, because it should then be in the form the particular character would use in real life, and the variations in the pace of the words and the modulations of the voice make learning easier, as the words take on a new vitality. It is worth noting that it is easier to learn the words by saying them out aloud—and this can be partly done in odd moments, in the bath or whilst dressing, for instance.

These individual rehearsals can, of course, be repeated as the production proceeds, and the more meticulous you are, the more you will have, until you are fully satisfied with each rendering. Such rehearsals more than pay for the time spent on them, and it is surprising what half an hour’s intensive work on the words will do; your ear will become attuned to all the little variations in tone and pace, so that you can insist upon a clean performance every time; indeed, it is the only way to polish your play. Merely to assemble your cast and go over and over the play without bringing something to it is a waste of time.

Your job, then, as a producer, is to polish—polish the

words, polish the movements, polish the gestures, polish the grouping, till there is a unity of sound and movement with a constantly changing pace of words and modulation of voice that will exactly express the mood and meaning of each speaker.

MOVEMENT

I. "BUILDING-IN"

THERE should always be economy of movement, but many amateur productions are ruined by lack of movement, and it is your job to prevent the production from becoming static. There must be sufficient movement to present to the audience a continuous series of smoothly changing pictures. But "movement" does not mean rushing about. Every time a character moves it must be for some *specific* purpose: e.g., a character may be seated and wishes to stress a particular point—so he stands up. This may entail one or all of the rest of the players on the stage changing their positions. It is up to you to bring this *animation* to your production and it means that a good deal of "building-in" will have to be done. This consists of movements and behaviour of characters not suggested by the author and is the point where the producer can show his or her *creative* powers. This "building-in" will vary, of course, according to the size of your stage. If it is very small such movements must be limited to the principal characters, otherwise an impression of confusion will be given.

Next time you go to the cinema note how the players use the various rooms they are in, and so look as though they actually *live* in them.

For instance, in a domestic scene in a flat, a husband may be shown in the bathroom, shaving, while a quick

shot is shown of his wife, in the nearby kitchen, frying the breakfast; perhaps they are having words—just a trivial incident, which could have been enacted in *one* room merely by showing the husband and wife standing opposite each other and quarrelling. Yet such a scene would lack variety and movement, look stilted and artificial and so lack conviction. As it is, the husband and wife are shown *doing* the things that are done by most grown-ups at that time of the day—and the little quarrel is made the more real by their having to talk louder, as they are in different rooms; while the husband has a shaving-brush covered with lather with which to emphasize his words! and the wife has the breakfast cooking in the frying-pan—which could easily be shown burning. The possibilities are endless.

You can't, as a general rule, dodge from one scene to another on the stage in this manner (occasionally a stage has shown the four rooms of a house in one setting) but you can make all the characters *do* something in their particular setting that we should all do in similar circumstances in real life. Quite often great care is taken to make a stage setting look as natural as possible. Yet when the players are using it they look like strangers in a strange land, when they are supposed to be in their own home; beyond perhaps sitting down, no *use* is made of the room.

The "building-in," therefore, is a vital part of your job and it is not sufficient to give *general* instructions. For example, if you had a table being laid for tea by a maid followed by the arrival of the guests, you would have to work out how many times the maid went to the sideboard and see to it that she brought the correct things back to the table, so that the job would be finished by the time the guests arrived.

Merely to allow her to fluff round and touch the cups

and wander vaguely about the stage is quite inadequate; and if she had to serve at table, you would have to decide at which *points* in the dialogue she approached the table; otherwise, if left to her discretion, she might screen a player at the moment when the latter had to speak. Furthermore, you could not have her doing certain things at one performance and totally different things at another, even if she had the stage to herself. Setting a tea-table on the stage is a complicated business, and every little movement must be worked out to fit in with the dialogue. Movement, too, must be carefully timed with all *exits*; nothing holds up the action of a play more than a character who finishes a speech centre stage and then walks off while the rest of the cast awkwardly look on. It is the producer's job to choose a suitable dramatic moment in the dialogue in which to move such a player nearer to the exit. There are occasions when a long dramatic pause is necessary, perhaps, to create a tense atmosphere, and then the "long exit" should be pointed by the grouping so that *all* eyes are fixed on the player leaving the stage—or *most* of them—according to the situation.

Here is a simple illustration of "building-in." The extract is taken from Act II of *Make-Believe*, by A. A. Milne. The scene is the schoolroom of a private house and Oliver and Jill are having a lesson with Miss Pinniger, their Governess—a severe lady who fails to appreciate children and their ways. Oliver has been reprimanded for not knowing his poetry, "After Blenheim," and poor Jill can't do her arithmetic. Oliver has been reading a book—concealed on his lap—all about a desert island, when he is caught by "the Pinniger woman" trying to slip it into Jill's desk. The Governess swoops down on Oliver, confiscates the book, and sweeps out to report such preposterous behaviour to his aunt.

OLIVER (*gallantly*): I don't care.

JILL: I did try to help you, Oliver.

OLIVER: You wait. Won't I jolly well bag something of hers one day, just when she wants it.

JILL: I'm afraid you'll find the afternoon rather tiring without your book. What will you do?

OLIVER: I suppose I shall have to think.

JILL: What shall you think about?

OLIVER: I shall think I'm on my desert island.

JILL: Which desert island?

OLIVER: The one I always pretend I'm on when I'm thinking.

JILL: Isn't there anyone else on it ever?

OLIVER: Oo, lots of pirates and Dyaks and cannibals and—other people.

JILL: What sort of other people?

OLIVER: I shan't tell you. . . .

You will notice that there are no stage directions given by the author. The two children are just sitting at their respective desks when the Governess goes out. And this little conversation could be carried on from those sitting positions.

But, as a producer, you must try and imagine what the reaction of those two children would have been to this monster. They would hardly stay in their seats. Oliver is frustrated and angry.

The scene is a schoolroom. No directions are given concerning the furniture but a blackboard resting on an easel would not be out of place.

Imagine, then, that Oliver says gallantly, "I don't care," sitting at his desk, while Jill rises and goes to his side and says sympathetically, "I did try to help you, Oliver." Oliver then rises and with great determination stalks across to the blackboard, saying as he goes, "You

wait." He then picks up a piece of chalk and draws on the blackboard a very hurried but grotesque caricature of "the Pinniger," at the same time saying the rest of his speech. The drawing is finished by the end of his next speech: "I suppose I shall have to think."

When Jill asks him what he will think about, he walks back intently to his desk and sits on the top of it with his legs dangling in front. He notices a pen on his desk, picks it up, fondles it, glances at the drawing he has just made, and as he says the word "cannibals" he throws the pen, like a dart, at the blackboard and scores "a bull"—in one of Miss Pinniger's eyes.

This could be done quite easily. The caricature could be worked out beforehand and the boy taking the part could practise drawing it till he became adept in getting the shape quickly; while the pen could be specially prepared with a dart-head instead of a nib so that it would stick easily into the blackboard. And most boys can throw darts!

Obviously the "building-in" must be relevant to the particular situation. To suggest, for instance, some extra movement for a minor character when the main character is holding the stage, would distract the attention of the audience and so ruin the scene.

II. GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

You must demand *ease* and *grace* of movement from your players. They should bear in mind the following points—

1. Stand erect—unless it is "character" acting, when a stoop may be necessary. But not *all* old people stoop, so don't overdo it.

2. For ordinary conversation stand as *naturally* as possible—feet a little apart with the weight on one leg and the other leg *slightly relaxed*. Avoid *stiffness* unless

the mood of the character changes and becomes aggressive, in which case it would be necessary to stiffen up with the feet a little farther apart. It is helpful to practise these poses in front of a long mirror.

3. Never allow a male character to put his hands in his trouser pockets merely because he does not know what to do with them and feels that they are in the way. It may be a necessary part of the characterization to use these pockets, e.g., for an easy-going modern young man, but in amateur acting there is always a tendency to "lose" the hands in this way, and much significant gesture is lost in consequence; besides, it tends to give the production a casual air.

4. When walking across the stage take your own natural steps—but remember that long strides look ungainly.

5. Stand or sit *still* once the position is taken up, and avoid either standing or sitting in profile—either face or half-face the audience.

6. If in the sitting position, don't lean forward and double the body up, to try and reach something from a nearby table. Get up, go close to the table and take what is wanted with the least possible effort.

7. When picking up anything—such as a cup or telephone receiver—use the arm farther away from the audience. This prevents *masking* part of your body.

8. If there are windows on either side of the stage and it is necessary to look out of them, do it facing towards the audience and draw the curtain aside (if necessary) with the hand farther away from the audience.

9. Don't make a problem of the hands and for beginners cut hand-gestures down to a minimum, but avoid *hooking*, i.e., that common gesture, usually with the right arm, which is fully extended slightly forward from the body, with the hand cupped, and is continuously jerked inwards to emphasize the words.

Of course, in character parts, such as a Jew or Frenchman, the hands will be constantly used (or in contrast, for a Chinese or Japanese, they will be used very sparingly); but as your players become more experienced they will begin to add significant little gestures of their own, especially in the more emotional scenes.

10. Facial expression is Movement, and you should try and register your feelings adequately in your face, otherwise the face will look like a mask.

11. If a character wishes to register *terror* as a result of suddenly hearing a noise, it is best conveyed by *quickly* looking out to the audience and then *slowly* turning the face towards the noise. If, on the other hand, it is not terror the player wishes to register, then the quick glance at the audience should be followed by a *quick* look towards the noise.

12. *Smoking*. In modern, sophisticated plays there is a tendency for the whole cast to smoke its way through to the bitter end. Unless the player is skilled, cigarette-smoking should be avoided as far as possible, because smoking on the stage is by no means as easy as it appears, and invariably cramps all gesture. Further, nothing looks worse than an amateur *trying* to appear casual and composed by taking out a cigarette, tapping it on a silver case, and blowing clouds of smoke about, when all the while he is in reality fumbling with it and looking very awkward and unnatural.

On the stage a cigarette often goes out unexpectedly; then there is the temptation to light it again involving "business" that retards the speed of the play; the lighter usually won't work, and this is bound to "get a laugh" if persisted in till it lights; moreover, smoke gets in the eyes and down the throat, when acting, so that the person concerned looks more like "the beginner" coughing and choking with that first cigarette.

As for a pipe! don't allow it—unless it is vital to the play, or it is "Sherlock Holmes" you are producing, in which case the handling of the pipe will assuredly be the most difficult "business" that that eminent sleuth will have to cope with during the course of his evening's investigations.

13. *Exits.* Great care must be taken not to hold up the action of the play whilst an exit is being made by a player.

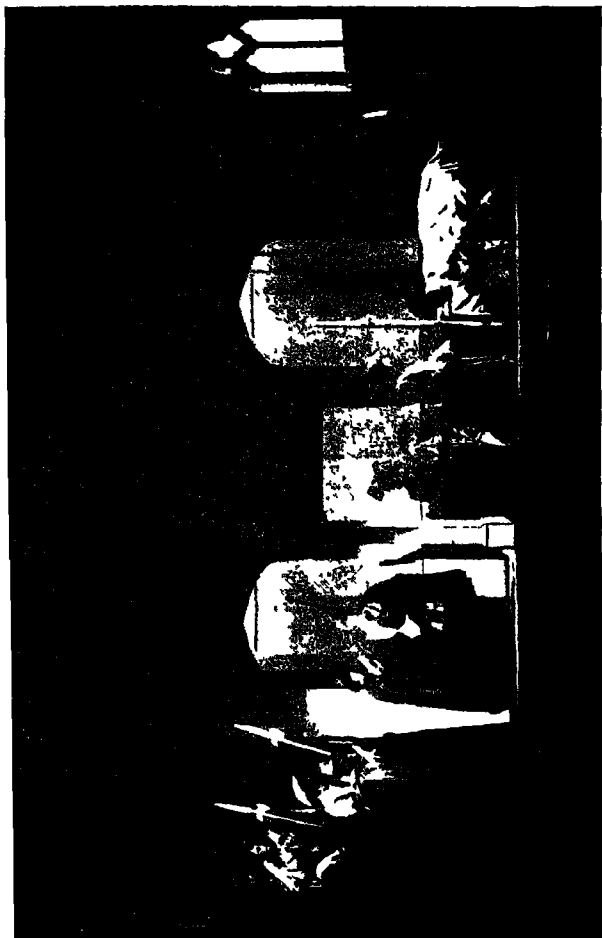
As a general rule the last speech before an exit must be broken at a suitable point so that the player can move over, turn, and deliver the last few words or sentence at the point of exit. This not only helps to break up the grouping at a dramatic moment but maintains the pace of the play.

There will be occasions, of course, when a long exit is of dramatic significance. A player, for instance, may have to reveal a secret, or perhaps sensational news, just before his exit. In such a case, a pause, while the player walks across the stage to the exit, may add considerably to the tension of the scene, especially if all eyes are turned on the player as he moves off, so that the exit itself becomes the focal point and an integral part of the drama.

Remember—

All gestures must be slightly exaggerated before they appear normal to the audience. A stage is a large frame to fill.

These movements and gestures should be practised by your cast, if they are quite inexperienced, before the rehearsals of a play begin. Get them used to walking gracefully across the stage, pausing, turning, and sitting down. Five minutes of simple exercises in movement will more than repay the trouble taken. You should then



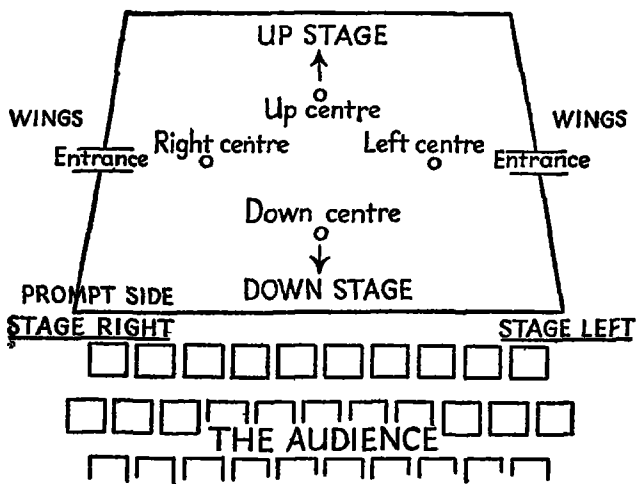
*"Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;
Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished:
For never was a story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."*

work out more complicated situations for the cast to practise, if you think they need it. It would be of great help to you to have a book on acting exercises, e.g., *The Amateur Actor*, by Frances Mackenzie (Samuel French) or *Acting Material for Dramatic Classes*, by Angus Wilson (Pitman).

STAGE DIRECTIONS

THE terms "Right" and "Left" always mean the player's right or left *when facing the audience*, so, when producing, care must be taken not to give these directions from the view-point of the audience.

Use the conventional stage directions shown in the following diagram.



The "Prompt Corner" is generally and conventionally at the Stage Right, but amateur circumstances sometimes necessitate the use of the Left side.

You cannot, on the amateur stage, be rigid about the Prompt Side, but it is a convention in the professional theatre to use the *left* side of the stage (from the audience) i.e., STAGE RIGHT. On a small stage your prompter may be in the way on this side, in which case suitable arrangements will have to be made on the other side of the stage.

Stage Turns

The simple rule to remember is this: when addressed by another player, or when, for any other reason, it is necessary to turn, *always turn so that the face rotates in front of the audience.*

THE TEMPO OF THE PLAY

Fix a time limit for learning the words. If you intend to take two months over a one-act play, insist on the words being learnt at the end of the first month. You need a month before your Dress Rehearsal without the books, because, obviously, they hamper movement and prevent any quickening of the tempo of the play as a whole.

Apart from the variation of the pace of the words in each speech, you must also have a variation of pace in each act or scene as a whole; in other words, the degrees of emotional intensity will be shown by varying the tempo.

This you must work out for yourself beforehand, by picking out each little *climax* (or large one, as the case may be), and quickening the pace as you approach it. Unless you do this your production will drag and become monotonous.

Mark these climaxes or emotional peaks clearly in your book and make all your cast do the same. You might draw a line down the side of the dialogue, starting from

the point where you think the tempo should begin to increase and continuing it up to the climax. Such a mark is clear and quickly seen.

Of course, there may be cases where a climax needs to be taken more slowly than the normal tempo, but this varies the pace just the same.

There may be several little climaxes in one act or scene and they may not, all of them, be obvious at first; but variations of pace there must be, for a slow, monotonous pace will ruin any play. This point cannot be over-emphasized. Variation of Tempo is the real secret of a good production.

One word of warning: a quickening of the tempo of part of an act or scene does not mean *gabbling* the words. They may have to be said a little faster but the main point is to pick up the *cues* more quickly—a fraction of a second makes all the difference.

Cues should always be picked up quickly throughout any play, unless there is some dramatic significance for a slight pause; but when it comes to increasing the tempo, your players must be smarter still on their cues.

In order to concentrate on this particular aspect of production you should, at one of your later rehearsals, sit with your *back* to the cast as they act, so that you can concentrate solely on *listening*—not only to the variation in the pace and tone of each speech, as previously marked in your book, but to the change of tempo of the act or scene as well. You should have your marked copy of the play in front of you, and make a note, as the play proceeds, of any speech or passage that needs extra polishing.

Some people find great difficulty in making the first speech or two convincing, after their entrance, and consequently it takes some minutes before they get into their stride.

This is usually due to nervous tension which causes breathlessness, and it can be overcome to a large extent by taking two or three deep breaths just before the cue to enter.

On no account allow your cast to carry on conversations with stage-hands or other helpers behind the scenes; and insist that each player is in good time for his entrances so that there is a chance to concentrate on the job in hand.

GROUPING

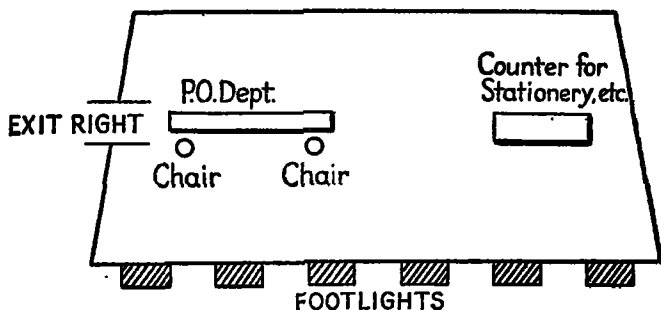
You must aim at keeping a series of *balanced* pictures before the eyes of the audience. Further, it is necessary to change continually the focal point of interest for the audience; thus you must move the characters about the stage and regroup them so that the audience never tires through looking at one spot. Such changes must not be made just for the sake of moving the characters about but must be made at suitable dramatic points.

Grouping depends, to a large extent, upon the arrangement of the setting, and when a table is necessary you should avoid placing it dead centre (unless the action of the play demands it) as in such a position it restricts the acting and makes any changes of grouping difficult.

You must also arrange your furniture in relation to the exit or exits, otherwise you may find your players bunched together in an ugly group.

An illustration from an actual production (by a Youth club) may serve to illustrate the relation between the setting and the grouping. The action of the play (*O.H.M.S.*, by Ronald Gow) is set in a village Post Office. There

was only *one* entrance available—Stage Right—and the producer arranged the setting as follows:—



The main action takes place behind and in front of the P.O. department and there are six characters. You will notice that the P.O. department was placed level with and adjoining the exit, and this arrangement led to the failure of the production.

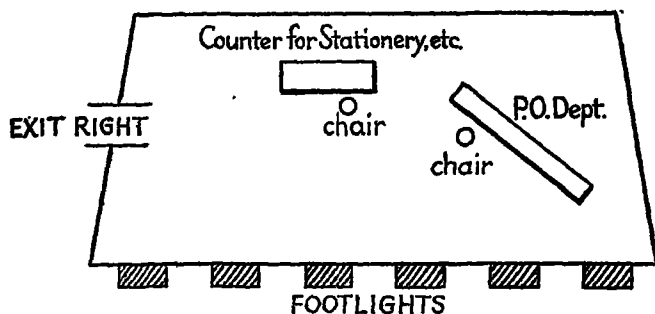
The Postmistress and her daughter were behind the P.O. department and as the other characters came on they sat on one or other of the chairs. When the chair nearer to the entrance was used, the character had but one step to take to reach it, and the audience never had anything other than a side view of the player, who looked, all the time, up stage. The player using the other chair had only half the stage to cross before turning and sitting—also in profile.

The other half of the stage with the stationery counter was not used at all, and when it came to grouping the whole cast, one character failed to get on to the stage at all so that her words were delivered from behind the curtain entrance!

Yet, if the P.O. department had been on the other side of the stage (Left), and placed at an angle instead of

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parallel to the back of the stage, what a difference it would have made!—



In the first place, since the action centres round the P.O. department, the characters would have made use of the *whole* stage, and by re-arranging the chairs the characters sitting on them would, at least, have been able to *face* the audience. The table for the stationery, etc., could have played its part instead of being ignored. This re-arrangement, also, would have given the producer a chance of re-grouping the players at different focal points, so introducing sufficient movement to give the scene an atmosphere of reality.

As it was, the production was lop-sided, ugly, and static—yet great pains had been taken over the setting which, as the curtain rose, *looked* most convincing.

If the scene allows it, it is helpful to have several levels such as steps or a dais, so that the players can be grouped at varying heights, thus avoiding the danger of straight lines. This is of particular importance when the cast is large—ten or more—and the action of the play demands that, at times, they should all be standing. If they were all at one level, the grouping would tend to be flat and the heads of the cast in a straight line—thus

making a dull and uninteresting picture, whereas it should be arresting and attractive through its variety.

Fantastic Comedies, (as *The Ugly Duckling*, by A. A. Milne) in which a scene is often set in a King's chamber, lend themselves to this kind of setting. It is always advisable to have such a King on a *raised* throne, for this allows not only for the King to tower over the Court, but for the other characters to move to different levels, and this movement, especially if the characters are in costume, gives to the production a sweep and fluidity which could never be achieved by acting entirely at stage level.

Again, quite often the scene is in a prison, or tower, or castle, as in *A Room in a Tower*, by Hugh Stewart.

In this particular play one of the characters—Lady Jane Grey—is imprisoned in a room in the Tower and is awaiting the Queen's decision concerning her release. There is a door leading into the room and one window (open) looking out on to the park. It is Spring, and Jane Grey has to look longingly out of the window at the beauty and freshness of the trees and flowers—and she has to deliver a long speech as she stands there.

In such a scene it would be far more effective if Lady Jane had to walk up several steps to reach the window, for not only would it help to give dramatic emphasis to her longing for freedom but it would break up any tendency to flatness in the grouping. It would further add to the attractiveness of the scene if there could be several steps leading down, from the entrance, into the room.

Great care must be taken in *crowd* scenes to break up the players into small groups of varying sizes and to arrange them at different levels. (Notice how film directors make use of stairways both in modern and period films.)

The photograph of an amateur production of *Romeo*

and *Juliet*, facing page 26, will serve to illustrate some of the foregoing points.

It is the final scene in the tomb and fourteen characters have to be grouped in the setting.

Notes. 1. The tomb might have been centre stage, but it would have cramped the grouping and spoilt the curve sweeping from the raised group to the tomb. (As previously suggested, a table centre stage in a modern setting usually cramps the grouping and *fixes* the focal point.)

2. If the players on the left had been standing at stage level the picture would have looked flat and the grouping jumbled, muddled, and undignified.

3. *Spacing* between groups. When splitting a crowd or large cast into smaller groups, you should avoid uniform spacing between each group or person. In this scene there are three small groups varying in size and arrangement: the *raised* group, the two players *standing*, and the group *kneeling* round the tomb. There is *variety* of grouping throughout the scene.

Remember. Grouping must be related to the dramatic requirements of the play, and as a general rule, the player who is for the time being the *central* character demanding the attention of the audience, must be brought *Up Stage* so that he or she is in a commanding position and can be *seen*; while the rest of the cast must be so arranged that they fall away *Down Left* or *Down Right Stage*, or both, as the occasion demands.

It is helpful if you can have several photographs taken of scenes from each of your productions—a considerable amount of knowledge about grouping and gesture can be gleaned in this way, for quite often glaring errors are revealed.

THE DRESS REHEARSAL

THE average amateur dramatic society needs about two months for the production of a three-act play, or for three one-act plays. This allows for two main rehearsals a week together with the extra individual ones, the number of which will vary according to circumstances.

Towards the end you may need one or two extra rehearsals, so that by the time the Dress Rehearsal is reached all the polishing is finished. The Dress Rehearsal is to give you and your cast an opportunity for collecting together all the odds and ends. The play should be gone through, and you must make a note of all the missing properties; and see that your stage manager—if you have one—knows where everything should go on the stage.

If possible, you should arrange this final rehearsal a night or two before the actual presentation to the public. It not only gives you time to alter that dress which was too long, but it gives your cast a chance to rest after the inevitable excitement of such a rehearsal, which often goes on into the early hours of the morning. If this is impossible start the rehearsal *early* on the night before the actual show.

"NOISES OFF"

THERE is no need to make a problem of this; get in touch with your local radio and gramophone dealer and ask for a list of "Effects" records. You can get almost every noise under the sun—a bird singing, a baby crying, a crowd shouting, aeroplanes zooming, dogs "barking, wind howling and so on, and it is advisable to

have a radio-gramophone behind the scenes, not only for supplying these noises, but for incidental music too.

If you have a wireless expert in your Drama group get him to fix up a second turn-table for you, so that you can switch from one effect to another, quickly.

For example, the opening scene of *Julius Caesar* requires a crowd effect. To have half a dozen people shouting behind the scenes sounds silly, but with a record of a crowd effect it is possible to convey the impression of the cheering of hundreds of people in the distance, and by turning up the volume slowly, the cheering can be made gradually louder to suggest Caesar's approach through the crowd-lined streets—so that by the time he enters, it is at its maximum and the "extras" on the stage can join in by shouting—one against the other—such words as "Hail!" and "Rhubarb!" Then when it is necessary for Caesar to speak, the "extras" stop first and the record can then be faded away to avoid an abrupt ending to the cheers.

This is simple and effective, and what is also very important: it is *controlled*.

Such methods are far more realistic for "noises off" than the old ones of relying on the local impersonator, or on some complicated gadget which never works on the night.

Read *Noises Off*, by Frank Napier (Frederick Muller).

Before playing any gramophone records in public you must get permission from The Performing Right Society, 33 Margaret Street, London W.1.

LIGHTING

If you have a permanent stage you should endeavour to build up a coloured lighting system. Here is a chance for your electrician—most amateur groups seem to have one.

Imaginative lighting can help to create the atmosphere of a play, but many scenes demand little beyond straight illumination; never, however, use ordinary daylight lamps for such lighting because of the hard cold atmosphere they produce.

The method of lighting your stage will vary according to the facilities available, but a small stage can be "flooded" from the front by the use of "floods" which can be home-made. The ordinary square biscuit tin is most suitable for the purpose and this should be fitted with a 250- or 500-watt daylight gas-filled lamp. The front of the tin should be slotted to hold the coloured gelatines. If you have footlights and front and back battens you would need 60-watt gas-filled lamps (coloured). It is a matter for experiment.

The following coloured gas-filled lamps* should cover the requirements of even the most ambitious society.

1. **Light Pink.** This gives a warm pleasant tone to the stage and is used for all *general* lighting.

2. **Straw.** Useful for "sunshine."

3. **Middle Straw** (deeper than Straw) is suitable for use with light pink when a cheerful atmosphere is required.

4. **Dark Amber.** This gives a rich tone to the stage and is very suitable for creating a mellow atmosphere required, for instance, in some costume plays.

5. **Dark Blue.** The usual lighting for night scenes.

6. **Moonlight Green.** Gives a moonlight effect and is used with dark blues.

* *Note.* If plain lamps are dipped in a coloured lamp lacquer, use the *vacuum*, not the gas-filled, variety; otherwise they will turn brown when used.

7. **Dark Green.** Seldom used for acting-area because of its destructive effect on make-up and costumes, but is useful for toning neutral (grey) curtains to a rich green for a woodland effect. For the acting-area in such exterior scenes Straw lamps could be used, or Straw "spots."

8. **Daylight Blue.** This colour is used far less than any of the others, and even then only to *dilute* other colours such as dark blue or green; but it is useful for helping to create an eerie, chilly, or steely atmosphere.

The advantage of having lamps in footlights and battens, over the "flooding" method is enormous, because the lighting can be changed at a moment's notice, and it is here that a *dimmer* is necessary. To be able to bring the lights up slowly, or to dim them slowly, means that you can introduce such effects as "sunrise" or the gradual falling of darkness, or that you can appear to turn the lights up and down as you would with an oil lamp and so regulate the intensity of light at any given moment.

"Floods" apart from their use for general illumination of small stages are necessary behind the scenes for "sunshine" or "moonlight" effects through windows or trees, and thus they add to the beauty and reality of the scene. You would need gelatines similar in colour to your lamps and other colours could be added if desired.

"Spots" (containing 250-watt gas-filled lamps) are used for concentrating a powerful light on a small area, e.g., in a night scene it may be necessary to illuminate a character without destroying the surrounding darkness, and by focusing a "spot" on the character it means that he can be seen by the audience who are still left with the impression of night. (A more powerful lamp could be used if desired—they are produced up to 1000 watts.)

Pay attention to small details: if a candle is blown out see that the lighting is lowered; see that the stage fire

looks alight. If a character has to switch off a light in a room see that the electrician working the switch-board synchronizes his movement with that of the character; nothing is more upsetting to the players than to have a second or more interval between the turning off of the stage switch and the lowering of the light. It is best to instruct the particular character not to take his hand off the switch till the light is actually lowered or put out, but many amateur plays have suffered because of a lack of such synchronization, which always causes laughter, and when that happens it is sometimes impossible for the players to restore the atmosphere of the play, especially if it is a tragedy.

In the previous photograph (*Romeo and Juliet*) the lighting effects were obtained as follows—

1. The back batten *behind* and higher than the arches was fitted with six 60-watt dark blue gas-filled lamps and the intensity of light was reduced by using the dimmer, which resulted in the creation of a gloomy atmosphere, and it also gave "depth" to the scene. There is *no* general lighting from footlights.

2. A 500-watt gas-filled "flood" fitted with a moonlight green gelatine shone from behind and through the stained-glass window on to the tomb.

3. The lighting on the group, Stage Right, came from a "Spot" fitted with a 250-watt gas-filled lamp and a moonlight-green gelatine, and was focused from Stage Left (top front corner).

Lighting apparatus can be hired quite cheaply. Write to Strand Electric and Engineering Co., Ltd., 24 Floral Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2; or to W. J. Furse & Co., Ltd., Stage Lighting Specialists, 69 Traffic Street, Nottingham.

The Small Stage and its Equipment by Angus Wilson (Allen & Unwin) is a useful book on the subject.

MAKE-UP

ENCOURAGE your group to do their own make-up, especially for straight characterizations. It is a good idea to encourage one member of the group to specialize in it and help the others.

The following Leichner make-up "sticks" (which in ordinary times are stocked by all the larger chemists and drug stores) would see you through most productions.

- No. 2. Pale Flesh Pink (female).
- No. 2½. Slightly Darker Flesh Pink (female).
- No. 3. Deep Flesh Pink (male or female).
- No. 3½. Light Brown—dull tan (female).
- No. 4½. Darker Brown—dull tan (male).
- No. 5. Yellow.
- No. 7. Dark Brown (Indian).
- No. 9. Deeper Tan (very bright).
- No. 12. Black.
- No. 20. White.

For straight juvenile characters of both sexes use the following make-up:—

	Male	Female
<i>Foundation</i>	Fair hair: No. 3 Dark hair: No. 4½ (or mixture of No. 5 and No. 9)	Fair hair: No. 2 Dark hair: No. 2½ or No. 3½
<i>Complexion</i>	No. 9 or Carmine 3	Carmine 2
<i>Eyes</i>	Medium Blue Liner (put thin line on top and bottom eyelids only)	Medium Blue Liner (cover eyelids and put thin line under bottom lid)
<i>Lips</i>	Carmine 2 on lower lip Carmine 3 on upper lip	Carmine 1 on lower lip Carmine 2 on upper lip
<i>Eyebrows</i>	Fair hair: Brown Liner Dark hair: Dark Blue Liner	Fair hair: Brown Liner Dark hair: Dark Blue Liner

For shading purposes use No. 9 lightly for both sexes.

In the case of an old character (both sexes) use a No. 5 foundation and add a little No. 9 according to requirements. If the character is "healthy" use Carmine 3 for complexion.

If the hair is white use No. 20 on the eyebrows. For lining, use Dark Blue or Lake Liner, and in the case of a very old character No. 20 may also be necessary for lining.

1. Do not apply too much Removing Cream to the face. Smear it on lightly with the finger-tips and then *wipe it off* so that the surface of the face is quite clean. Then apply the grease-paint. The same cream is used for removing the grease-paint after the performance.

2. Do not use too much grease-paint, and don't apply the stick too near the hair. Make the first application on the cheeks and just over the eyebrows and work it outwards. If you do not do this you will get a thick ridge round the edge of the hair.

3. When colouring the cheeks for straight juvenile parts, put the grease-paint on the top of the cheek-bones and work it towards the ears. If used lower down on the fleshy part of the cheeks it will give a hollow impression to the face. This may be necessary, of course, in a character part.

4. Always powder the face after the application of make-up, and keep it powdered throughout the performance. Nothing looks worse than a greasy face on the stage. Work the powder well in until it is thoroughly absorbed in the grease-paint and then dust the face over with a small soft brush or hare's-foot.

✓ You should use for this purpose a proper *Blending Powder* which can be obtained in various shades.

5. You should have by you a supply of *crêpe hair* in several colours. This will be curly when you unwind it;

if you need some to be straight soak a portion over night in cold water.

6. When making a moustache fix each side separately. That is to say—cut your moustache in half before gumming it on the lip. Don't apply spirit gum to a surface covered with grease-paint. Stick your moustache or beard on *first* by applying a little gum to lip or chin and allowing it to dry for a few moments before applying the crêpe hair. Trim with sharp scissors, *after* you have finished the rest of the make-up, to the shape required. You can, of course, buy ready-made moustaches.

7. Wigs should be hired.

It would be advisable to consult a book on the subject such as *Practical Make-up for the Stage*, by T. W. Bamford (Pitman).

COSTUME

IF you choose a play requiring *elaborate* costumes it is cheaper to hire them. However, home-made costumes give a chance for experiment and some one-act plays are the more effective for the inventive mind of a costumer; but whether you hire or make your own costumes you must bear in mind that just as colour plays its part in Lighting, so is it important to choose the right coloured costume to suit each of your players.

First consider the character; we all know that certain colours suggest particular qualities of character, e.g., green for a shallow stupid fellow, like Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night* (his costume could, of course, be trimmed with a white material and he might wear a large white ostrich feather on his hat, but the predominating colour, green, suggests the type of man he is—green!).

Similarly, those characters showing great warmth of feeling or boldness should be dressed in bold red costumes, while for the quieter, sweeter, more retiring characters light or darker blue costumes, or even white ones, should be chosen. If one of the characters has a streak of cowardice in his make-up, then yellow might appear somewhere in the costume, if only in the form of a sash, while black or purple, of course, suits the villain.

Imagine Father Christmas, that warm-hearted kindly and beloved old character, dressed in anything other than RED !

You must also consider your background. For costume plays, a curtain setting is the more suitable as the colours stand out better. Black curtains throw bright costumes into relief better than the grey, and have the advantage of suggesting depth, while they cause little or no trouble with shadows from the lighting. The disadvantage, as pointed out before, is that black curtains will not take coloured lighting. The ideal curtain-set would be neutral-grey one side and black the other, so constructed that they could be quickly reversed.

The costumes will naturally lose some of their effectiveness if they are placed against a background of varied and vivid colours.

Your stage lighting must suit your costumes as well as the setting. It would be disappointing, for instance, if you had taken great pains to make a special costume in, say, scarlet silk, and had been unable to finish it till the night of the actual show only to find that it looked *black*, because you had previously chosen a green lighting scheme; but that, in fact, is what would happen. If you turn a full green light on to a red costume it turns it black, so perhaps the following little chart will help you—

1. A Green light will turn Red material Black.
2. A Dark Amber will turn Green material Black.

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3. A Middle Straw light will turn Blue material Black.
4. A Blue light will turn Yellow material Black.
5. A Green light will turn Blue material a Greenish Tinge.
6. A Violet light will turn Blue material Dark Blue.
7. A Dark Amber light will turn Yellow material a Reddish tinge.
8. A light similar in colour to the material merely intensifies the colour of that material.
9. Light Pink has little effect on any colour except Green.

These effects will depend upon the intensity of the lights used, but they should serve to guide you when you are deciding on your lighting and costumes.

Read the following well-illustrated books on costume:—
Book of Dramatic Costume (giving effect of coloured lighting on coloured materials), by Dabney & Wise.
(Harrap)

English Costume Series by Iris Brooke:

1. *Early Middle Ages*; 2. *Later Middle Ages*; 3. *The 17th Century*; 4. *The 18th Century*; 5. *The 19th Century*. (A. & C. Black)

A History of Costume, by Carl Köhler and E. von Sichert. (Harrap)

Historic Costuming, by Neville Truman. (Pitman)

MUSIC

APART from interval music and “noises off,” it is an advantage to have a radio-gramophone because music can sometimes be used effectively for linking scenes together, or even, on rare occasions, as a background.

It needs to be music suitable for the mood of the scene or the moment, and would give a chance to one of the musical members of your group to shine.

For instance, a quiet background of music, such as: *I Call Upon Thee, Jesus* (Bach, H.M.V. D. 1464) would be very suitable for the closing lines of *Romeo and Juliet*. It would be an aid to the emotional expression of the play.

During the production of your play it is helpful to make a list of suitable music you hear over the wireless, and the titles can be checked from *The Radio Times*.

STAGE SETTINGS

THIS is the most vexed problem of all, and it is to be hoped that all future schools, Village Halls, Youth Clubs, etc., will be built with permanent stages, complete with lighting and interchangeable sets, including curtains.

The chief point is to be certain that you know the type of setting you intend to use.

It could be—

- (a) Realistic.
- (b) Formal,
- (c) Impressionistic.

If you decide on a *Realistic* setting it means that you or your Stage Manager must make the scene as true to life as possible, and it is on this very point that many amateur productions fall short—and all for the want of a little extra care.

In a kitchen scene, for instance, how often the setting has been ruined by an inadequate display of china on the dresser; an odd cup and plate merely looks ludicrous. Or in a period setting, what a pity it is when the character

is supposed to be living in Victorian times but holds up the latest edition of some well-known newspaper to read—and sends a titter round the audience.

The collection of accurate “props” for realistic settings is often a tedious business, but if the job is started when rehearsals begin, and *not* a day or two before the actual performance, then there is ample time to look round—and it is surprising what can be borrowed or hired if only sufficient trouble is taken.

In some plays, such as Shakespeare, or fantasies, detailed settings are not necessary, and then a *Formal* setting is adequate. This means choosing only one or two accurate pieces which represent the room or garden you wish to portray.

For instance, Sir Toby Belch’s room in Olivia’s house in *Twelfth Night* would appear quite effective if the only furniture were a solid period table and three chairs, together with a stoup of wine and several drinking cans. On the other hand, when a film of *Romeo and Juliet* was made in Hollywood great care was taken to make elaborate Realistic settings. How far these settings helped the film is another matter—but realism was aimed at; whereas most stage versions of this play are given Formal settings.

The *Impressionistic* setting calls for imagination. The aim is to try and suggest by some pictorial effect or even sound, the dominant note of the play. It is a very advanced technique and can easily be quite meaningless. On the other hand you might well have a brain-wave and think of some special shape which harmonizes with the theme of the play and will help to accentuate it.

Supposing you were producing *Columbine* by Reginald Arkell (Nelson), that delightful little fantasy where an old country yokel is asked to decide whether Harlequin or Pierrot shall marry Columbine. The setting is an exterior on Cissbury Ring, on the Sussex Downs, at

twilight. A Formal setting would be quite suitable—an old tree-trunk to sit on, with perhaps a tree or two in the background (cut out of ply-wood); but the *dominant note* of the play is that sincere love, however simple it may be, will conquer in the end. You could, then, dispense with the Formal setting, and have an enormous heart made, with an opening in it large enough for a person to walk through. This could stand, shall we say, across one corner of your stage (which could be bathed in green lighting) and the *real* lovers Pierrot and Columbine, could make their entrances and exits through this opening in the heart, while the conceited and boastful Harlequin could use an entrance which is lost in the gloom, to give the *impression* that *his* love is worthless.

A further impression might be added by the use of sound; Harlequin's entrances and exits might each be preceded by a fanfare of trumpets (gramophone record)—except his final exit, which might be accompanied by the blast of a single trumpet—*out of tune*.

The impression then, of true love, is suggested by the shape of the heart and the true lovers walking through it; the snarl of the fanfare suggests arrogance, boldness, and boastfulness; while the discords on the trumpet suggest failure.

This is a very simple illustration and a very simple shape, but it may help to give you some idea of this fascinating aspect of Stage Settings.

It must be borne in mind, however, that a well-equipped stage will not cover up the shortcomings of the acting—rather will it accentuate them. *It is the acting that comes first and that is paramount.*

Therefore do not let your choice of play be dictated by the shortcomings of your stage. Try to overcome the difficulties—that, surely, is one of the pleasures of amateur dramatics.

THE AMATEUR CLUB

There is not a special acting technique for make-shift stages. Whether you present your play at Drury Lane or on a few shaky boards in the local village hut, it makes no difference to the technique required, beyond certain modifications in movement. A convincing actor can hold his audience just as well on a drawing-room floor as on a perfectly equipped stage; he can make you forget the surroundings, and if the audience, at an amateur production, is distracted by such things as Settings or Lighting, it means that the production is something of a failure.

So aim high. Forces are at work to help you. Join one of the Drama Leagues:—

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE,
9 Fitzroy Square,
London, W.1.

THE SCOTTISH COMMUNITY DRAMA ASSOCIATION,
19 Melville Street,
Edinburgh 3,
Scotland.

From these you can get expert advice and borrow plays (see previous list) or sets of plays—a very important point, because it is necessary for you, as a producer, to keep in touch with the latest publications. Further, it is an advantage, if an actual production is impracticable, to have certain evenings given over to play-reading with your group, and by this means it is possible, as previously suggested, to decide on the next production.

Get in touch with your County Librarian; arrangements

are often made for the loan, not only of single copies or collections of plays, but of *sets*, too.

You might start a Play Library of your own by asking for subscriptions of a penny or twopence a week from your members and appoint your own librarian. The following are useful books: *Twentieth Century Drama*, by Lynton Hudson (Harrap); *The Theatre Through the Ages*, by W. Cleaver (Harrap); *The Play Produced*, by John Ferrald (Deane); and Theatre and Stage Series: *Drama Festivals and Competitions*, by John Bourne; *Practical Make-up for the Stage*, by T. W. Bamford; *Dramatic Criticism*, by S. R. Littlewood; *The Art of the Play*, by Herman Ould; *Acting for the Stage*, by Sydney Carroll; *Problems of Acting and Play Production*, by Edwin C. White (Pitman); *British Dramatists*, by Graham Green (Collins); *A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama*, Vols. I and II, by Allardyce Nicholl (C.U.P.). Also encourage your group to read about the theatre in other countries, e.g., *American Drama and Stage*, by Boyd Martin (Pilot Press) and *The New Soviet Theatre*, by Joseph Macleod (Allen & Unwin) or *The Theatre in Soviet Russia*, by André van Gyseghem (Faber & Faber).

Now that a number of Counties have appointed Drama Organizers you will have an opportunity of knowing what other societies are doing by taking part in Drama Festivals, and it is to be hoped that visits will be arranged between society and society and that later on the better productions will go on a short tour. This will not only set a standard at which to aim, but will make a production more worth the effort, for one of the weaknesses of amateur play production is the fact that so much energy is expended for one or two local performances. How much more encouraging it would be if you knew you were to give a dozen shows in different parts of your county.

There is a long way to go—but Drama, like Music, must play its part in our national life; and now that there is a growing consciousness of the necessity of Education for Leisure, perhaps the Drama will find its rightful place in the curricula of schools, whether Primary, Grammar, Modern or Technical, and of the County Colleges.

